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Lisa L. Lambert,
For the United States Trustee

**IN THE UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
DALLAS DIVISION**

IN RE:	§	
	§	
HIGHLAND CAPITAL	§	Case No. 19-34054-SGJ
MANAGEMENT, L.P.	§	
	§	
Debtors-in-Possession.	§	(Chapter 11)

**UNITED STATES TRUSTEE'S MOTION FOR AN ORDER DIRECTING
THE APPOINTMENT OF A CHAPTER 11 TRUSTEE**

A hearing will be held on January 21, 2020. The objection and response deadlines will be governed by the Scheduling Order, ECF No. 269. The Court orally denied the U.S. Trustee's request to have this motion considered in connection with any Governance Motion. See Scheduling Order, ECF. No. 269 and transcript.

**TO THE HONORABLE STACEY G.C. JERNIGAN,
UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY JUDGE:**

The United States Trustee for Region 6 moves for an order directing the appointment of a Chapter 11 Trustee based on cause and the best interests of the creditors. 11 U.S.C. § 1104(a).
The United States Trustee would show:

Overview

Documented management concerns mandate a trustee in this case. This Court has recognized that Highland's management concerns involve a culture that surpasses the officers and board. Steps such as replacing the board or having a chief restructuring officer who reports to the Court rather do not fix Highland's problems.

Prior efforts to use external oversight to curtail Highland management's self-dealing have failed. As the Acis case demonstrated, the Highland Capital cases have many inter-connected relationships. A trustee can nimbly evaluate whether the inter-company transactions are in the best interests of the estate and creditors. In the Acis case, the trustee concluded other options were either superior, cheaper, or less-conflicted. A board is farther from the impact of the related-entity transactions and the culture of the debtor. It meets periodically. Here, the inter-connected relationships include the Debtor's bank as well as other legal entities.

The remedy Congress defined for these facts is a trustee. The Court should direct the appointment of a trustee.

Jurisdiction, Power, and Standing

1. The Court has subject matter jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1334, 28 U.S.C. § 157(a)(1), and the standing order of reference. Appointing a trustee or examiner impacts the case administration and therefore is a core matter that the Court has the power to resolve. 28 U.S.C. § 157(b)(2)(A).
2. The United States Trustee has standing to seek appointment of a trustee or examiner. 11 U.S.C. §§ 307, 1104.

Facts

The Acis case involved findings of fraud, self-dealing, and mismanagement by this debtor:

3. This Court presided over the Acis bankruptcy case, case number 18-30264. In *Acis*, the Court catalogued the decision-making authority as belonging to James Dondero, as president; Mark K. Akada, chief investment officer with a decreasing role; Frank Waterhouse, as treasurer; and –by delegation of authority – Highland in-house counsel Scott Levington and Isaac Leventon. With the exception of Mark K. Akada, the same individuals have decision-making authority for the debtor-in-possession. *In re Acis Capital Mgmt., Inc.*, 584 B.R. 115, 119, 131. The Court found the Acis witnesses’ testimony “of questionable reliability and, oftentimes, there seemed to be an effort to convey plausible deniability.” *Acis*, 584 B.R. at 131.

4. “[S]ince the arbitration award [in favor of Terry, the petitioning creditor], there has been a calculated effort (largely by Highland) to effectively liquidate the Alleged [Acis] Debtors.” *Acis*, 584 B.R. at 148. The Court found the Alleged Debtors were “really out to protect –Highland and Highland-affiliates” in contravention of their fiduciary duties of loyalty. *Acis*, 584 B.R. at 149.

5. In addition to finding breaches of fiduciary duty when Highland promoted its self-interests over those of Acis creditors, the Court found “evidence of both intentional and constructive fraudulent transfers.” *In re Acis Capital Mgmt., L.P.*, 2019 WL 417149, at *11 (confirmation opinion also referencing “actual intent to hinder, delay, or defraud”).

6. After the Court directed the appointment of the Acis chapter 11 trustee, the chapter 11 trustee found service providers unrelated to Highland entities. These providers were cheaper and decreased conflicts.

Prior Efforts to Cabin Highland Capital Management's Self-Dealing and Other Willful and Intentional Acts Have Failed.

14. Highland has been found to engage in self-dealing and other misconduct for years. The prior efforts to remediate and change the culture have failed.

15. In 2014, the SEC determined that Highland had historically engaged in multiple transactions in its client advisory accounts without disclosing that Highland was acting as principal or obtaining client consent before the trades were completed. The SEC required

Highland to retain an outside compliance consultant and to implement that consultant's recommendations.

16. [REDACTED]

17. Cumulatively, the findings of this Court and other tribunals establish that the problems exist in the management culture at Highland. These problems go beyond the officers and directors.

18. The general partner of Highland is controlled by Dondero.

19. Moreover, the integrated nature of the board for Highland-related entities allows for the possibility that individuals removed from the board and from management may still monitor the financial transactions and use their relationships with the Highland's employees to direct outcomes. For example, Highland proposes to bank, in part, with NexBank. The NexBank website reflects that Dondero chairs the board and Okada is a director. Similarly, Highland Management, the debtor, has intercompany transactions with Highland Capital Management Korea Limited, Highland Capital Management Latin America, L.P., and Highland Capital Management (Singapore) Pte Ltd.

Legal Analysis and Argument

20. The United States Trustee is charged with monitoring the federal bankruptcy system. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 586(a)(3); *see also United States Trustee v. Columbia Gas Sys., Inc. (In re Columbia Gas Sys., Inc.)* 33 F.3d 294, 295-96 (3d Cir. 1994).

21. Before confirmation, the Court "shall order the appointment of a trustee . . . for cause, including fraud, dishonesty, incompetence, or gross mismanagement of the affairs of the debtor by current management, *either before or after* the commencement of the case, or similar

cause.” 11 U.S.C. §1104(a)(1) (emphasis added). In addition, by adding appointment of a trustee as a remedy in section 1112, “cause” also may be factors traditionally resulting in dismissal or conversion. 11 U.S.C. §1112(b)(1). Here, an additional factor is “bad faith.” Alternatively, the Court must appoint a trustee “if such appointment is in the interest of the creditors, any equity security holders, and other interests of the estate.” 11 U.S.C. § 1104(a)(2).

22. The Fifth Circuit has indicated that the burden of proof for the appointment of a trustee is “clear and convincing” evidence, but the Court later adopted the dissent’s opinion. *Cajun Elec. Co. v. Louisiana Elec. Co. (In re Cajun Electric Power Co-Op, Inc.)*, 69 F.3d 746, *on reh’g*, 74 F.3d 599 (5th Cir. 1996) (adopting dissent).¹

23. The duties of a trustee are defined in section 1106, and the Court has the ability to tailor some of them. 11 U.S.C. § 1106(a).

24. The “cause” to appoint an examiner or a trustee may be a reason other than the enumerated factors. *Oklahoma Ref. Co. v. Blaik (In re Oklahoma Ref. Co.)*, 838 F.2d 1133, 1136 (10th Cir. 1988); *cf. Little Creek Dev. Corp. v. Commonwealth Mortg. Corp. (In re Little Creek Dev. Corp.)*, 779 F.2d 1068, 1072 (5th Cir. 1986) (defining “cause” in context of dismissal statute).

25. For example, courts have appointed trustees or examiners when the debtor’s insiders have conflicts of interest arising from the sale of the Debtor’s assets. In *Cajun Electric*, the Fifth Circuit affirmed the appointment of a trustee, in part, because the co-operative members

¹ In *Grogan v. Garner*, the United States Supreme Court held that the burden of proof for dischargeability fraud actions was preponderance of the evidence. *Grogan v. Garner*, 498 U.S. 279, 291 (1991). In reaching this holding, the Supreme Court cataloged both bankruptcy and non-bankruptcy fraud statutes and held that Congress generally imposed a preponderance standard for fraud in civil proceedings.

were interested in purchasing part or all of Cajun Electric's assets. *Cajun Elec. Power Cooperative, Inc. v. Central Louisiana Elec. Co., Inc. (In re Cajun Elec. Power Cooperative, Inc.)*, 69 F.3d 746, 751 (5th Cir. 1995) (Garza, J., dissenting), *adopted as majority opinion on reh'g*, 74 F.3d 599 (5th Cir. 1996). The Fifth Circuit held that "a trustee may be the only effective way to pursue reorganization" when the management has cross-purposes. *Cajun Elec.*, 69 F.2d at 751.

Cause exists to appoint a chapter 11 trustee:

26. Here, both express statutory standards and the common law case standards for "cause" exist. Specifically, "fraud, dishonesty, incompetence, or gross mismanagement of the affairs of the debtor" and bad faith exist under the facts of this case.²

27. The record regarding a series of self-dealing categories reflects both incompetence and gross mismanagement. *SEC Judgment*, pp. 5-7.

28. Other "cause" exists to appoint a trustee because tribunals have historically found the management's testimony unreliable and the Debtor's actions as reflecting willfulness and intent. This Court has found that the Debtor's management had fraudulent intent when it removed assets from Acis.

It is in the best interests of creditors to appoint a chapter 11 trustee.

29. Appointment of chapter 11 trustee is also in the interests of creditors, equity security holders, and other interests of the estate. The Court should direct the appointment of a chapter 11 trustee to serve the "interests of creditors, any equity security holders, and other interests of the estate." 11 U.S.C. §1104(a)(2).

² "The United States trustee shall move for the appointment of a trustee under subsection (a) if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that current members of the governing body of the debtor, the debtor's chief executive officer . . . participated in actual fraud, dishonesty, or criminal conduct in the management of the debtor or the debtor's public financial reporting." 11 U.S.C. §1104(e).

30. First, it is in the best interest of the creditors to have an independent trustee to assume control over the estate in order to evaluate any alter ego claims, avoidance actions, and other tort claims.

31. Second, it is in the best interest of the creditors and other parties-in-interest to have accurate financial information. Accurate financial information ensures parties understand the facts of the case and avoids post-petition liabilities for violations. Like the information provided to investors in securities filings, the information provided in a bankruptcy case depends on affirmative disclosure.

32. Other efforts to check or monitor the Debtor's management have failed. The Acis trustee's actions reflect a need to be able to bid competing services and replace related-entities when conflicts of interest or cost concerns arise.

33. Congress has defined the remedy for the facts of this case. "The court shall order the appointment of a trustee." 11 U.S.C. § 1104(a).

Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, the United States Trustee requests the Court to

- a order the United States Trustee to appoint a Chapter 11 Trustee; or
- b grant to the United States Trustee such other and further relief as is just and proper.

Dated: December 23, 2019

Respectfully Submitted,
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Certificate of Service

I certify that on December 23, 2019, I sent copies of the foregoing document on to the attached service lists by first class United States mail and by ECF notification to those listed below.

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